Motivations and Intentions:
A Case Study of Design-Led Activism

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***Abstract*:**

With a focus on intention and motivation, this paper describes a study involving three organisational communities and their collective effort to develop and provide more inclusive housing for people with disabilities and their families. While many studies, such as that by Rocha & Miles (2009), focus on commercial organisations, and sustainability from an economic perspective, this study involves a not-for-profit organisation (the accommodation and service provider) as well as a research organisation and a design action group volunteering their services free of charge. From this pro-bono context, the paper describes a case study that explores the nature of the collective as a basis for creative practice and political activism and the theoretical implications and wider application in terms of emerging research in the area of collaborative entrepreneurship and design activism.

Introduction

Recognising the complexity of contemporary issues, organisations increasingly utilise the collaborative effort of individuals and groups (Martin-Rodriguez et al 2005). In the main, however, this appears to be confined to those sectors that have the resources (financial and otherwise) for attracting and sustaining diverse groups of specialists. Of course, complex problems exist everywhere; a reality well known to community-based not-for-profit organisations attempting with limited resources to deal everyday with highly complex social issues such as homelessness, unemployment, and disability, to mention but a few. In addition to service provision, these organisations are being increasingly faced with the need to be involved in research and advocacy (Ansari & Phillips 2001, p. 354).

Several months ago three organisations formed a collective with the goal of collaboratively developing a more independent and inclusive housing model for people with disabilities and their families. The organisations include: a not-for-profit community group (the housing provider and builder); a local university undertaking research and development for the project; and an advocacy arm of the professional body, the Design Institute of Australia

(DIA), coordinating design services such as interior design, industrial design, graphic design, architecture and landscape architecture as well as other specialist consultants such as engineers, occupational therapists, and lawyers. Apart from the community group employees all members and contributors participate on a voluntary pro bono basis.

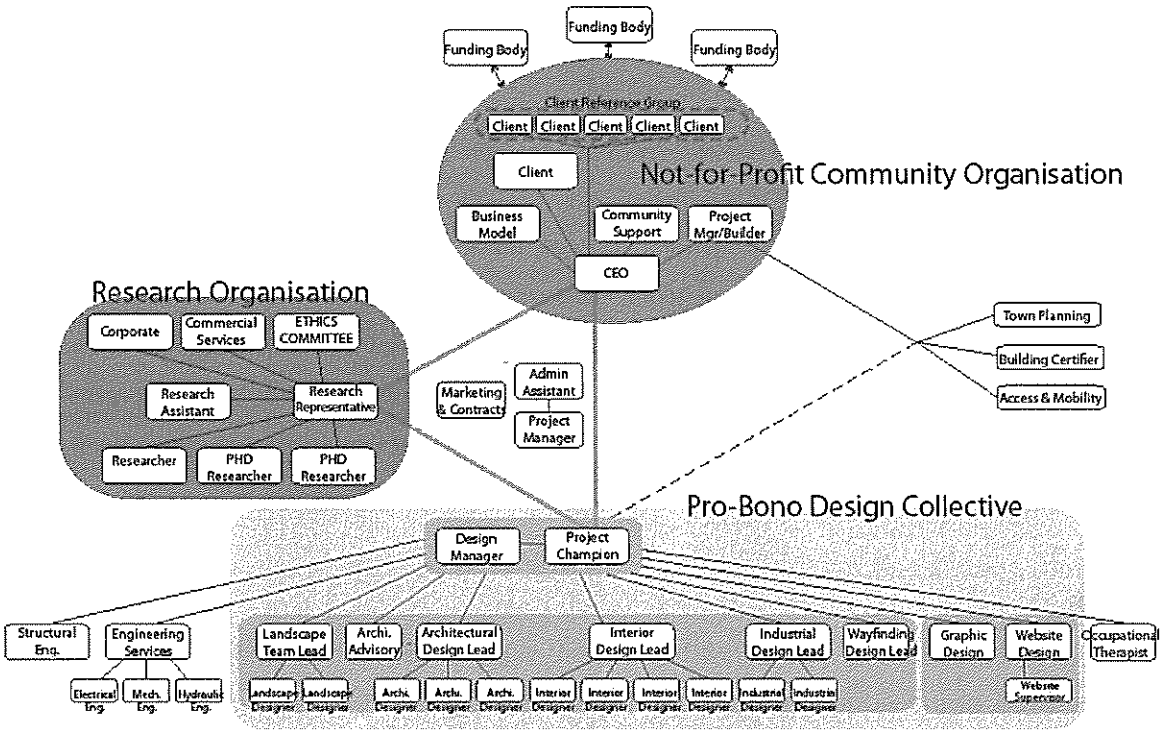

Figure 1. The collective structure.

As illustrated in Figure 1, each organisation has its own membership of other organisations, departments and individuals. In terms of the community organisation, there is a service arm as well as a social enterprises arm charged with developing and maintaining financially sustainable enterprise businesses and activities that contribute to the overall vision and strategic objectives of the community organization as a whole. As a whole the organization is committed to providing socially just services to enable the sustainable development of individuals, families, communities and organizations. This is in accordance with its vision of fair, sustainable communities that instill hope, embrace diversity, promote safety, and in which all people feel a sense of belonging. Values and belief explicitly proclaimed by the organization include: social justice; respect;

cultural recognition; belonging; participation and inclusion; self-determination; hope; strengths; collaboration; innovation; and accountability.

The social enterprises arm undertakes activities that contribute to the financial viability of the Association as well as producing positive social outcomes. One such activity is to do with property acquisition the goals of which are: affordable social housing; disability accessible housing; and contribution to the financial sustainability of the parent organization. The independent living project forming the focus for the collective arose from acknowledgement of the need of families with an adult son or daughter with a disability to obtain secure, long term accommodation and support options for their family member. In this respect, there are two components to the project: the first, working with families to explore their hopes and investigate different models; the second, realising the option once it has been identified. This is the basis upon which the Collective was formed.

The vision of the Collective is a best practice model of collaboration involving professionals, institutions, community organizations and people with disabilities and their families to develop environments that advance practices of Universal Design and the right of people with a disability to fully participate in the community. The aim of the Collective is to provide a world's best practice model of Universal Design and Adaptability that is the impetus and basis for government and community to enact their hopes for an inclusive society enshrined in Human Rights and Disability legislation worldwide. The Collective will work to achieve this through the development of a process and model of housing design and development that is collaborative, innovative, affordable and environmentally sustainable.

Representing the community group in the project are the family clients, community support personnel, material and equipment suppliers, and various funding bodies ranging from philanthropic organisations through to government departments and banks. There are also specialist support people responsible for administration, accounting, occupational therapy, access and mobility, building certification and town planning.

With respect to the university, there is the university representative and research leader, a research assistant, PhD students embedded in the project focusing on various aspects of the project such as policy and design, the university ethics committee as well as its corporate and commercial services departments, in the main managing issues to do with intellectual property.

The inclusion of a research group highlights the speculative and exploratory nature of the project and associated requirements of criticality, rigour and ethical conduct. In addition, it plays an integral role in recording, reporting and disseminating process and outcomes, in the process making its contribution to knowledge accessible and open to critical scrutiny.

Representing the Design Action group is the design manager coordinating the contribution of the various design groups as well as external consultants. The project and the three organisations are managed by a project manager located at the heart of the collective. All the individuals and groups mentioned including the client families are considered as active members of the collective. In accordance with a hybrid consensus design process developed by (Author, 2004), it is considered highly important to include the client families (also users), consultants and others involved throughout the design process as their involvement leads to more positive outcomes (Ansari & Phillips 2001; Day 2003) symbolising in the process the community organisation's and the collective's vision of an inclusive society.

Due to the paucity of research involving collaboration in pro bono situations, research informing the project and this paper on the formation of the collective has been substantially informed by the research on interprofessional collaboration in the institutional healthcare sector. Even here, researchers note deficiencies and limitations particularly in relation to the motivations and intentions of those undertaking collaborative work.

As highlighted by Rocha & Miles (2009), mainsteam approaches to collaboration in organisations and across organisations are understood to be driven by self-interest and the challenge of developing cooperative behaviour out of self-interest. In an attempt to go beyond this and develop and sustain collaborative capabilities in inter-organisational communities they argue that human nature has the potential to consider the 'other' as well as the 'self'. With a similar focus on intention and motivation, this paper uses the collaborative project just described to more fully understand the nature of the collective as a basis for creative practice and political activism and the theoretical implications and wider application in terms of emerging research in the area of collaborative entrepreneurship and design activism. In terms of design activism Fuad-Luke (2009), like Rocha & Miles (2009), identifies a lack of understanding in current literature about the intentions and motivations of those involved in collective practice. The study described in this paper actively seeks to address this through the application of grounded theory methodology establishing the basis for the development of a motivational framework.

'The Collective' - formation and articulation

Based on the work of Drinka (1994), D'Amour et al (2005), highlights how groups go through five main stages of development: the forming stage where the group is beginning to establish itself; the norming stage where norms, patterns of behaviour and expectations are identified and developed; the confronting stage where team members come together and learn more about each other; the performing stage where they work on the issue or project at hand; and the dissolution stage where team members leave. At the time of writing this paper, the group was experiencing the first four stages highlighting that the stages are not necessarily consecutive but in fact iterative. In addition, the process revealed strong accord with various dimensions of a process of collaboration developed by D'Amour (1997); namely, a finalization dimension involving the explication of shared goals, recognition of divergent motives, multiple allegiances, and expectations regarding collaboration; an interiorisation dimension where a sense of belonging and trust develops through an awareness of the professionals' interdependency and of the need to manage this interdependency; a formalization dimension where protocols and procedures are developed and set in place; and a governance and leadership dimension giving explicit attention to expertise and connectivity (in D'Amour et al 2005 p.123).

As our group started to form, the need to understand it in order to guide its formation and manage it became increasingly apparent. While a fundamental aspect of this was identifying a shared vision and goals as pointed out above, it also involved working out the type of group we had started to become, wanted to be and could be. Given our philosophical and substantive focus on inclusion, we very early established the need for the group to be a holistic entity operating in a synergistic way producing outcomes that would be more than an aggregate of parts. In this respect, then, the labels of partnership, team, network, or coalition seemed to fall short of encapsulating the full meaning of what was possible and necessary for our group.

In addition to being an interprofessional, interorganisational and intersectoral entity (Axelsson & Axelsson 2009), the group could also be characterised in terms of the relationship between the disciplines. For example, was it to operate as a multidisciplinary group where different professional sub groups work essentially independently but in a coordinated way; or as an interdisciplinary group where there is greater integration and sharing of knowledge and professional responsibility and the potential for enhanced cohesion (D'Amour et al, 2005, p. 120)? Given its holistic and synergistic aspirations, and acceptance of a consensus design

process, the goal of the group was for the disciplinary relationships to be transdisciplinary involving where possible an opening up and blurring of professional boundaries with the view of developing new knowledge that transcends individual discipline or professional ownership.

It was obvious early on that the scale of the project demanded a complex and adaptive system (Souhbi et al 2009) and that in effect a new form of community was emerging; a community that had the potential (perhaps even, obligation) to be a learning organisation in its own right, and that through its mandate for social change was also fundamentally an activist group. In this respect, then, and for the time being, the group was comfortable with the notion of itself as a collective.

Operating as a Collective

Given the above understanding of our group, one of the main aspects to address, as noted generally by various researchers such as Soubhi et al (2009), was how to transcend professional boundaries in order to integrate distinct professional and disciplinary activities and foster collective capability. In this respect specific attention had to be given to how members would learn through adaptation; a process involving balancing not only what they know but also what they would be doing collectively (Souhbi et al 2009, pp. 52-53). An added complexity was how they would do this through the limited time available outside their full-time jobs. As noted by Souhbi et al (2009), even in situations such as hospitals where professionals are engaging regularly in conversations about their practice, the processes of building knowledge and adjusting practices transformational learning are severely challenged. In response and in line with Fraser & Greenhalgh (2001), they propose developing an appreciation of the community of interacting professionals as a complex adaptive system where the interdependent parts integrate to form an emergent structure that cannot be predicted from the parts; one where, subsequently, it is essential to give particular attention to the competence, capability and values of the professionals involved. In terms of values, Soubhi et al (2009) give emphasis to the relational value of caring for patients with the knowledge value of practice, reinforcing the view of other researchers such as Gilbert (2005) that "improvements in both values are more likely when care is patient-centered, when professionals value the creation and sharing of knowledge, and when their learning activities are geared closely to their needs and interests" (p. 54). Implicated in this is the significance of reflection and of "...making visible the group's explicit and tacit knowledge" (p.54).

Overall, Soubhi et al (2009) propose that organising what professionals do requires an understanding of the human as well as organisational factors that facilitate collective work and learning (p.55). While technical skills are important so too are emotional factors as well as various ethical and moral factors such as altruism, reciprocity, equity and fairness (p.55). Organisationally, attention has to be given to the structure of practice that best aligns and supports these values, possibly one of a continuum ranging from centralized control through to a fattened hierarchy characterised by decentalised communication and coordination, trust, and openness to experimentation (Souhbi 2007 in Souhbi et al 2009, p. 55). For Souhbi et al (2009), fundamentally what is required is "...a balance between head and heart, cognitive and non-cognitive abilities, technical skills and insightful compassion, system design and ethical dimensions of professional practice", the synthesis of which will more likely enable professionals to address the challenging problems of everyday practice (p.56).

Providing further information on facilitating collective action is earlier research by Martin-Rodriguez et al (2005) who make the statement that collective action "...requires that the parties forego a competitive approach and adopt one based on collaboration" (p. 133), something which they argue is more likely to happen when explicit attention is given to interpersonal relationships between professionals (interactional determinants), the organizational context (organizational determinants), and the organisation's external environment (systemic determinants). In terms of the latter, these are components of social (for example, social status and stereotyping relating closely to issues of equality/inequality), cultural (for instance, professional values that advocate for autonomy and are therefore in contradiction of the sentiments of inclusion and collaboration), professional (professional organizations implicitly supporting domination and control as opposed to collegiality and trust), and educational systems (occupying a significant position in educating (or not educating) for collaborative practice. With respect to the organizational context, determinants include the structure of the group (with greater support for horizontal structures) and its philosophy (particularly one that values participation, fairness, freedom of expression and interdependence), resources (especially the availability of time and spaces to meet) and administrative support available to the group to support practice and convey the vision of collaborative practice), as well as mechanisms for communication in and coordination of the group (of significance here being the formalisation of rules and procedures, and opportunities for all professionals and participants to meet). Giving emphasis to interpersonal relationships are the interactional determinants such as willingness to collaborate, trust, mutual respect, and communication skills (Martin-Rodriguez et al 2005, pp.134-142).

As highlighted above, literature on interprofessional collaboration gives substantial emphasis to human and relational values. In the healthcare context from which the literature is drawn one of the main barriers to sustaining collaboration is the professional boundary and an inability by professionals to see beyond self interest and even be willing to give up a part of one's territory if necessary (Axelsson & Axelsson 2009, p. 324). For Axelsson & Axelsson this is exacerbated by the structure of the group. In the case of our collective project, the structure that has emerged due to its complexity and the number of professionals and stakeholders involved demands what Axelsson & Axelsson would describe as a high degree of both vertical and horizontal integration with integration sought through a combination of coordination and collaboration. Labeled a matrix structure, Axelsson and Axelsson describe how it often leads to conflicting demands and expectations, creates double loyalties and can contribute to rather than overcome territoriality (p.324). As a response to this they suggest exploring the concept of altruism as an alternative; altruism being based on a concern for others and for society as a whole and understood as the "...ability to transcend and sacrifice particular interests for a common purpose" (Krebs & Miller, 1985 in Axelsson & Axelsson, 2009, p. 324).

In understanding how this might be addressed and actioned in the project, our research turned to the work of Rocha & Miles (2009) in the area of humanistic management and collaborative entrepreneurship. They argue that "...in order to develop and sustain collaborative capabilities in inter-organizational communities, a set of assumptions that takes both self-regarding and others'-regarding preferences as ends is required to avoid any kind of instrumentalization of collaboration, which is an end in itself" (p.457). Despite the fact that all participants in the project had volunteered their services and were undoubtedly driven by altruistic goals, articles such as that by Rocha & Miles (2009) and Ansari & Phillips (2001) prompted us to consider that these may not be the only goals and that a motivational framework should be developed that recognises a range of motivations and seeks to address the needs of its members while at the same contributing to successful outcomes for the project and the collective as a whole. In terms of design activism, Fuad-Luke (2009), like Rocha & Miles (2009) and Ansari & Phillips (2001), identifies a lack of understanding in current literature about the intentions and motivations of those involved in collective practice recognising that "personal motivation may embrace needs, desires, goals, a certain philosophical approach, or other intrinsic factors. Activities can also be driven by a strong sense of altruism or morality, aimed at delivering benefits for the greater

societal good (although there may not be consensus on what this 'good' constitutes). Aside from these intrinsic factors, external circumstances can provide strong motivational forces" (p. 18).

Given the significant role of designers in this project, an empirical study was planned that would first externalize their intentions and motivations. This would then be followed by similar studies of all other participants. The following section reports on the findings for two groups of designers: the interior design group and the architecture group.

Designers' motivations and intentions

Data from the two design groups were collected via a two focus groups, one for each discipline group. Each group involved approximately five to six participants. Using a semi-structured approach the members of each group were asked the same questions about their reasons for joining the Collective, what they perceived as their contribution, and what they saw as challenges and benefits. The focus group interviews were recorded with the permission of group members and analysed in accordance with Grounded Theory methodology which involves the researcher working with the participants to actively construct the data and arrive at multiple levels of meaning (Charmaz 1995); an inclusive approach that aligns with the vision and mission of the Collective. For the main, the analytical approach included open coding involving categorization and axial coding involving identification of relationships between categories. Given that the focus group interviews are yet to be finalized for other participant groups, selective coding analysis aimed at theory formation was not undertaken.

Several categories emerged from the analysis in terms of the participants' motivation. A significant motivator for all participants was the opportunity for personal enjoyment, satisfaction and spiritual growth reflected in the following extracts:

- participate in something exciting and meaningful
- to be able to enjoy one's work and revitalise
- to experience design/architecture in a more fundamental way
- experience it as a journey – through immersion at various levels and looking at things from different angles
- to have the potential to grow it and take ownership
- be involved in cutting-edge work

- to be accepted and considered as an equal despite extent of knowledge and experience – no experts, act on an equal basis
- be part of an open-ended process where things are not defined at the start
- to have opportunities to push boundaries and challenge, opportunity for new experiences
- to experience something life changing and discipline changing, to be a part of pushing things further, reignite belief in interior design – compliment the vacuous, to do something inspiring (creative potential)
- to get out of the rut, be less frustrated, to fill the void, to be liberated, to step back
- to do something you actually want to do – not have to as in paid work

Aligned with the above was the expectation for professional growth involving the opportunity to learn more about the role of research in design and to do research; to have an introduction to academia and how it operates, to learn by doing and by participating with all involved, with all stakeholders, by getting it out there, and to integrate the theoretical and the practical. In addition, participants identified developing networks, consolidating skills (communication and collaborative skills), enhancing career development, learning the language of design, and learning more as reasons to be involved.

Some participants also highlighted a social dimension in their desire to be a part of a group, of belonging to a group that was pushing things further.

The above are reasons for involvement based on personal goals and satisfaction however participants are also motivated altruistically to contribute to the community and society including their own profession. Responses include:

- to do something positive, to help others, to give back to the community
- to be proactive, to contribute something of value, do something genuine
- to provide some balance to a mainly non-genuine world
- to walk the talk
- to raise the profile of the profession and the activist role of design

In terms of what they could contribute, participants cite the following cognitive and emotive contributions:

- complimenting the range of skills, knowledge (content and procedural) and experiences – generic as well as discipline specific, for example, good listening skills, guidance regarding best practice, specific knowledge in the area, younger/fresher views, knowledge that is transferable, personal experience of having a sibling with a disability
- empathy, enthusiasm, passion, energy, open minded, not blinkered

The main external challenges to realizing their goals and that of the Collective include:

- time
- flow of communication through the group without too much structure
- communication with other design teams
- creating and maintaining a non-threatening environment
- maintaining equality and equity
- working with different levels of age, skill, experience

Some of the internal personal and professional challenges include:

- lack of experience
- how to prevent your input from being diluted
- maintaining ownership
- how to be interdisciplinary at the same time as maintaining professional deference
- how to make expertise available to the group
- dealing with new processes such as research and contexts such as academia
- dealing with preconceptions about the other design disciplines
- throwing off past behaviours
- having an open mind in a new way
- how to enjoy the process of working together
- understanding your place in the group
- dealing with pre-judgements
- how to maintain energy
- having fun with the group
- personal commitment

Discussion

Overall, these responses appear to support the theories proposed by McAdam et al 2001 in Thorpe (2008) as to why people decide to participate in collective action. These are:

- Resource mobilization/mobilizing structures: people participate in social movements when organizations and individuals step forward to mobilize resources on behalf of a cause.
- Political opportunity: people participate in social movements when viable opportunities appear.
- Collective action frames/collective identity: people participate in social movements because of the way the issues and actors are framed culturally and emotionally by the movement and because participants in movements can help frame issues and actors.
- Social paradigm: people participate in social movements because they are concerned about the greater good...(pp.4-5).

The responses also point to a visionary type of desired change – one that is about looking forward and inventing new visions, in this case, of more inclusive housing for people with disabilities which then becomes the demonstration artifact of what is better (Thorpe 2008, p. 5). While this should not be surprising given that designing by definition is about imagining new or alternative scenarios, the business reality of design and architectural practice often means that profit is put before or seriously impinges on concerns for human welfare. As pointed out by Collier (2006), "...empathy between end-users and architects is an essential but not always realized part of morality in architecture ...and when extended more widely than a given situation, may lead architects to question the social, political and ecological contexts of their work and thus motivate them to prioritise the 'ethical' in all the choices they make" (p.307). For the designers involved in the collective, it appears that the project, in contrast to their paid employment, enables them to more fully exercise 'moral imagination' and be more faithful to their mandate of creating appropriate places and contexts of social life, the purpose of which is by definition ethical (Collier 2006, p. 307).

Added to this it seems, is the opportunity to more fully realize "...interdependence, affiliation and the quality of the human and communal relationships" such as trust, integrity and concern for others (Collier 2006, p.310). In this sense then, it is important to be aware of how the project provides for 'good' practice and a context of and for communal 'flourishing' (Collier 2006, p. 310). The responses for the interior design and architecture groups also highlight how the participants have been drawn together by common challenges, opportunities to "...develop and

share the capacity to create and use knowledge" (Collier 2006, p. 310) and a passion to make a difference in people's lives at a fundamental level.

Acknowledging and addressing intentions and motivations

This section draws together the findings of the empirical study with the literature in an attempt to develop a conceptual base for acknowledging and addressing the intentions and motivations of the project participants. A mechanism that is central to this is design. According to Fuad-Luke (2009), "design is already 'activated' in trying to address contemporary issues" (p.20) albeit that "while it is acknowledged as a powerful communicative force it has failed to communicate its own social and environmental ambitions to society and so remains perceived as merely a servant to powerful economic imperatives" (p.50). As identified through the focus groups, the project offers participants a way of actively countering a 'history of egoism' (Fuad-Luke 2009) and of undertaking a journey that is personally transformational as well as contributing to a greater social good.

In this respect then it makes sense to invite participants to focus on design and collaboratively explore how the project can capitalize on its moral and creative potential. "Moral deliberation is exploratory when it reflects on situational possibilities; artistic reflection is investigative when it suggests design and enactment possibilities"...both are forms of creative self-expression (Collier 2006, p. 314). This can be facilitated through keeping at the forefront of the participants' consciousness the vision and values of the Collective and the need for empathy for all involved. In part this can be supported through the provision for dialogue, sharing points of view, recognizing what each member brings to the project, and generally developing a context that promotes and sustains belonging and trust (D'Amour et al 2005). For individuals and their personal growth, there is the need for a clear idea of purpose and intention and critical and creative self-reflection involving individual and collective intentions and outcomes and assessment of outcomes with intentions (Collier 2006; Fuad-Luke 2009). Such considerations can be further supported and facilitated through the design of effective management, operational and governance processes including behavioural protocols, formalization of rules, and the provision of resources and services that support the members and assist in the design and operation of collaboration, induction and training (Rocha & Miles 2009) as well as the explication and dissemination of shared goals and knowledge. In part, this is being addressed in our current project through the development of a website as well as an in-house repository.

In all, there is need for intentions and motivations to be externalized and articulated, for the human as well as the organizational factors to be addressed, and for recognition of divergent motives, multiple allegiances and expectations (D'Amour et al 2005). For our project, this has been addressed through the formal inclusion of research - of our collective practice as well as of the substantive issues of the project. In summary, adopting an all inclusive action research ethos incorporating various research projects using different methodological lenses) aids in the externalization and documentation of the process, invites experimentation, critical exploration and rigour, enables generic skill development, makes visible explicit and tacit knowledge as well as intentions and motivations (as exemplified in this paper), and reminds us continuously of our ethical roles and obligations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper reports on a project that responds to several deficiencies noted in literature, namely: the absence of a user perspective in interprofessional collaboration; the lack of empirical data providing a finer grain understanding of the relationship between systemic, interorganisational and interactional determinants; and the lack of a motivational framework for interprofessional, interorganisational and intersectoral collaboration. While the study is currently limited by its focus on a small group of designers, it does demonstrate the relevance of interprofessional collaborative theory for the pro bono sector and the potential of design activism to address potential conflict between self-regarding interests and other-regarding interests (Rocha & Miles 2004).

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